

Post
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The U.N.'s Job in Iraq

IRAQ'S interference with the United Nation's weapons inspectors has been a persistent theme in its sparring with the United States and its allies. Earlier this month, the Iraqis threatened U.N. inspectors' flights into the country. But on Tuesday they announced a change of heart, and on Thursday 52 technicians and staff from the U.N.'s Special Commission on Iraq flew in—the same day American planes bombed an Iraqi radar station in the northern no-fly zone.

The special commission's assignment is to strip Iraq of the weapons forbidden it under the U.N. resolution that ended the gulf war nearly two years ago and to set up a monitoring system to ensure that none of those weapons comes creeping back covertly. It has made substantial progress.

Iraq's large and well-equipped nuclear program was dismayingly close to building weapons. Now, after much hide-and-seek with the Iraqis, the commission has dismantled much of it. While no one rules out the possibility that there may be further nuclear materials hidden, the United Nations is fairly confident that Iraq no longer has the capacity to produce them. Nearly all the prohibited material discovered so far has been successfully removed.

To deal with chemical weapons, the special commission has built two facilities, each a sub-

stantial industrial plant. At one, it has destroyed more than 5,000 rockets loaded with nerve gas and has neutralized about two-thirds of the stock of nerve agents. The second plant, the one to incinerate the mustard gas, is now ready to go into full operation, but there's a stock of several hundred tons of the gas to deal with.

Missiles with ranges of more than 150 kilometers are prohibited to Iraq, and the commission has destroyed everything it has found—not only the missiles but the launch vehicles, the guidance systems and the factories to produce them. It's clear that Iraq was also working on biological weapons, and while it had apparently not produced much, the need for a careful watch is obvious.

The commission is now beginning to set up its long-term process of surveillance and verification. To do that it needs, among other things, the full list of companies in other countries that supplied Iraq with the means to make its illicit weapons. Iraq says it wants normal relations with the United States and an end to the embargo on its oil. Before that can even be considered, Iraq is going to have to meet a series of conditions. First among them is full acceptance of the U.N. resolutions and full cooperation with the U.N. special commission that is working with stubborn courage to carry them out.